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TAGS: PGOV KWMN KDEM PGOV PHUM NU

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: NOMINATION FOR THE SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: A. STATE 99729
1B. MANAGUA 1308
1C. MANAGUA 1195
1D. MANAGUA 1102

11. (U) Embassy Managua is pleased to nominate Sofia Montenegro for the Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage, per ref A.

12. (U) Full Name of Nominee: Sofia Isabel Montenegro Alarcon

13. (U) Job Title and Institution: Executive Director, Center for Media Research (Centro de Investigacion de la Comunicacion, CINCO) and leading founder of the Women's Autonomous Movement (MAM).

14. (SBU) Date of Birth: February 15, 1954

15. (U) Country of Birth: Nicaragua

16. (U) Citizenship: Nicaragua

17. (SBU) Contact Information: 505-887-6363,
ma mujeresnic@yahoo.es

18. (U) Justification: "The more autonomy civil society has before political society, the stronger it will be." This sentiment has guided Sofia Montenegro through nearly four decades of battling for democracy, gender equality and human rights. From her origins as a militant of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) before it came to power in 1979, through her public break with the pro-Ortega faction of the FSLN in the early 1990s, to her current role as director of two of Nicaragua's key NGOs, Montenegro has consistently led Nicaragua's movement for human rights and equality. She remains politically active today -- a vocal critic of President Daniel Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo, regularly commenting on their authoritarian tendencies.

19. (U) Montenegro is currently Executive Director of the Center for Media Research (Centro de Investigacion de la Comunicacion, CINCO) and a leader of the Women's Autonomous Movement (Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres, MAM), of which she was a founder. CINCO is an NGO guided by three principles - freedom of association, freedom of expression, and a person's right to information. With these guiding principles, Montenegro and CINCO have focused primarily on the development of an ethical and independent media and on the role of youth and women in a democracy. As a founder of MAM, Montenegro has established a civic organization to address the contradiction that women comprise half of the population, but are in a position of political, economic, and social subordination. MAM and Montenegro seek to raise the profile of women in society, so that they can be viewed with equality, enjoy the same measure of personal freedom as men, and actively participate in the political, economic, and social environment. Montenegro has summarized MAM's work this way, "The Movement is about personal transformation as much as it is about fighting to transform public policies."

110. (SBU) Montenegro believes sexual violence leads to severe political and social repercussions, and is symbolic of the dominant male and subordinate female roles in Nicaraguan society. In this context, the goal of MAM and the women's movement in Nicaragua is to, as Montenegro said in a 1997 interview, "expressly declare their objectives to fight against subordination (of women) and for the transformation of values and conditions for women." Similarly, she views the case of President Daniel Ortega's alleged sexual abuse of his stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Narvaez, as illustrative of Ortega's "patriarchal and anti-democratic" style of governance. Based in part on Zoilamerica's case, Montenegro and MAM declared Ortega a "coward" with no moral authority to govern and called on women around the world to come together in the fight for justice and solidarity. Montenegro and MAM have led the charge in denouncing Ortega both domestically and internationally, leading Paraguay's incoming Minister of Women to declare Ortega "persona non grata" for the inauguration of President Lugo. In response to Montenegro's leadership, women's groups around the region have mounted protests against Ortega's visits to their countries, including Paraguay, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica (ref D).

111. (U) Because of Montenegro's outspoken criticism of the Ortega administration's undemocratic tendencies and the subsequent women's protests

112. (U) The government's effort to discredit Montenegro through administrative procedures has been conducted in tandem with an attack campaign

113. (U) Despite the government's unrelenting attacks, Montenegro has continued to champion women's issues, gender equality, and democracy in N

114. (U) Embassy Managua's POC for women's issues is PolOff Michael Garcia, tel. 505-252-7405, and e-mail is garciam4@state.gov.
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